

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
February 23, 2016 at 7:08 pm

Members present:

Ermete J. Raffaelli, Chairman
Wayne Jonas Bealer, Vice Chairman
Michael E. Lauter, Secretary
William F. Cinfici, Assistant Secretary

Staff present:

Andrew W. Miller, Planning Office
Deborah A.S. Hoag, Department of Public Works

Others present:

Dale C. Egan, Egan & Egan LLC
Thomas P. Egan, Egan & Egan LLC
Aristides I. Otero, Stackhouse Bensinger Inc.
Anthony M. Balistrere, Berks Catholic High School Inc.
Douglas F. Smith, Berks Catholic High School Inc.
Patrick J. Dolan, Dolan Construction Inc.
Mary Jane Smith
Michelle N. Lynch, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the February 23rd meeting to order and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the February agenda, as presented. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the February 23rd agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Egan Storage – final land development plan [0:00.44]

Dale Egan clarified that they weren't intending a demolition, and would reuse and refit the existing car wash structure as storage units, with additional units placed around the perimeter of the property. He said the existing driveways would remain and one of the car wash bays would be kept open for drive-through traffic. Gates would provide access for a one-way travel from West Greenwich Street to Lincoln Street. He thought they'd addressed everything identified in the Planning Office review. Mr. Miller asked that they more-clearly specify those features to remain on an existing conditions/demolition plan. Dale Egan said not much was changing, and the existing paving only being disturbed where the new buildings are to be located. He said there'd be no changes in the utility services, the site lighting or grading. He said some new electric would serve the gate openers. Asked if the entrance gate would cause any on-street 'stacking' of vehicles, Thomas Egan indicated space enough for one vehicle to queue without impeding the West Greenwich Street cartway. Dale Egan characterized visits to such facilities as 'rare'. He said the Berks County Conservation District didn't intend to review the minimal disturbance, to which Mr. Miller asked for a note referencing that determination. Regarding the width available for travel through the site, Dale Egan said it was wide enough for two cars, and added that the entrance gate pivots straight up, as there wasn't enough room for a sliding design like that designed for the exit gate. He said both would be equipped with loading and metal sensors for approaching vehicles. Ms. Hoag questioned the access available between the northern row of units and the northern parcel boundary. Thomas Egan indicated it would be limited to foot traffic. Rephrased in the context of emergency access, Dale Egan thought the length of the area in question would be within the reach of fire hoses. Mr. Lauter doubted the lessees would consent to carrying their wares from the ends of the aisle to their units. Dale Egan noted the 5-foot-by-5-foot sizes of those units implied storage limited to seasonal needs, and suggested bollards could be added to prevent anyone attempting to drive it. Asked about the zoning classification, Mr. Miller answered the 'Commercial Neighborhood' district. Thomas Egan mentioned that they'd received a zoning permit. Mr. Lauter imagined the look of the rear façades of the units facing West Greenwich Street. Dale Egan noted the six-foot buffer with plants, but without the fence elsewhere bordering the site, thinking it would detract from the appearance. Thomas Egan explained that the Zoning Office had directed the six-foot setback, and named Virginia sweetspire and gray dogwood as the landscaping proposed for that space. He said key codes would operate the gates. Dale Egan said there wouldn't be any internal lighting or other electric within the storage units. Mr. Cinfici asked about the extent of, and policies covering the storage of hazardous materials. Dale Egan said those limitations are clearly specified in the lease agreements, and now on the plan notes. He said photo identification would be required of all tenants, and noted the other potential problem of abandoned belongings. He said existing lighting,

along the north side of the property, would remain, even as the vacuum cleaners are removed. Mr. Cinfici asked about the policy on vehicle storage. Dale Egan said there wouldn't be any outdoor storage, but would allow it within the units if disclosed on lease and limited in combustible materials to whatever gasoline remained in the tank. Thomas Egan said the units are of a prefabricated-steel kit design, in a tan color with a bronze trim. Ms. Hoag asked that the plan needs some additional labeling of dimensions. Asked about their intended supervision of the facility, Dale Egan committed to 'daily' visits. Mr. Lauter suggested fencing the entire perimeter to discourage vandalism and protect the landscaping. Mr. Miller agreed, thinking an ornamental design would soften the look of the street-side units. Dale Egan proposed chain-link fencing. Mr. Miller suggested a powder-coated aluminum, as he assumed the gates would be, in consideration of the neighboring residential setting. Dale Egan noted the space provided by the wide sidewalk. Mr. Miller advised street tree pits that are, in fact, required by the Zoning Ordinance. Dale Egan said the Zoning Office didn't want trees, and required the setback as a match with the rest of the street. Mr. Cinfici asked about the storage of other gasoline-powered equipment. Dale Egan again referred to whatever might be 'in the tank', noting the difficulty in enforcing any stricter regulation. Mr. Miller noted the tendency of such units to be used for vehicle servicing. Dale Egan acknowledged the challenge. Ms. Hoag said she hadn't received anything regarding stormwater management. Dale Egan thought it unnecessary, since they weren't changing anything. Ms. Hoag said compliance with the regulating ordinance must still be documented. Dale Egan said he'd follow up with his engineer. Mr. Miller said they'd need to wait on the County Planning Commission's input, assuming they'd since resolved an application fee discrepancy. Thomas Egan said they did. Mr. Lauter agreed with the fencing and street tree suggestions, and noted the neighborhood's 'Queen Anne' (National Register) historic district recognition. Dale Egan confirmed that the key codes would be required at both the entrance and exit gates, not only for security, but for the information in records on lengths and times of visits. Asked about other intended surveillance, he said they hadn't yet decided, noting a street camera at the intersection. Mr. Miller alluded to their experience with the car wash having motivated the proposed conversion to storage units. Dale Egan said he'd even offered to give the property to the neighboring church, tired of the car wash hosting vehicle mechanics that occupy the wash bays, preventing would-be paying customers from doing so, the futility of having law enforcement intervene, and the frequent vandalism that follows. He said he was proposing the new use 'out of desperation'. Mr. Miller hoped the remaining issues could be resolved by the next meeting.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the 'Egan Storage' final plan. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the proposed self-storage project at 245 West Greenwich Street.

Building Addition-Stadium Upgrades (Berks Catholic) – sketch land development plan [0:37.22]

Mr. Otero described two separate additions totaling approximately 10,400 square feet, one to the front of the existing high school building and one at the rear. He said they'd also replace the running track at the adjacent stadium and convert its field surface from grass to artificial turf, allowing for more-frequent use and following rain events. He indicated four off-street parking spaces to be eliminated, still leaving 230 spaces where the Zoning Ordinance requirement was calculated at 99. Mr. Miller acknowledged that he hadn't yet prepared his own review for them to respond to. Regarding the parking, Mr. Otero explained that the requirements are dictated by the combination of the faculty and driving-aged students. Mr. Bealer observed the frequent 'overflow' into the lawn areas during events. Ms. Hoag felt the basis of that requirement was insufficient given the frequency and capacity of those events, especially those at the stadium. She suggested they explore additional parking opportunities, both off- and on-street, adding that the changes to the stadium field would drive increasing demand on its use. She said that even afternoon team practices tend to fill the available parking. Asked if they'd still utilize their Shemanski Stadium in Saint Lawrence Borough, Mr. Balistrere said they will. Asked to further explain the trend toward artificial turf, he said there are twenty different 'programs' currently using the field. *[recording stopped at 45:17 in]* He said that volume of use requires a more-durable surface. Mr. Smith mentioned the longer 'recovery time' following rains. Mr. Otero said drainage is achieved through a stone underlayment with fabric-wrapped piping pitched toward the sidelines, and ultimately connected to the public storm sewer system. He said they've arranged for soil testing, scheduled for that coming Monday, to determine the feasibility of on-site detention and infiltration measures. He said snow may be removed with standard plows, albeit with protected blades, noting that the surface also tends to warm faster than natural grass. He claimed to be waiting on a determination from the Berks County Conservation District regarding the classification of 'disturbance' and the associated permitting required, recalling a similar interpretation for an Albright College project. Mr. Smith said the look of the multistory additions would complement the existing building, though not with the extent of glazing suggested by the rendering. Mr. Otero described the front addition as a combination of classrooms and 'support space', and an expansion of the cafeteria. Mr. Balistrere explained that they currently operate on a four-period lunch schedule, beginning at 10a, and prefer to reduce that to three periods between 11a and 1p. He described part of the second floor as an open 'learning commons' floor plan for group work, two standard classrooms, and another six classrooms on the next level up. He recalled a student population of 471 at Holy Name, prior to the merger with Central Catholic, and 800 in the same

space now. He said they're aiming for class sizes in the 'low to mid 20s'. *[picking up with the second audio file – about 6½ minutes lost – referring from 45.18 to 51.42 of the BCTV file to cover the gap]* He said the rear addition is intended for a new weight room, with a potential mezzanine level for 'cardio machines', having displaced their existing weight room in an earlier pursuit of more classroom space. He figured construction wouldn't begin until May 2017 and finish in the fall of 2018, with the athletic field project coming earlier. Ms. Hoag questioned the arrangements for the parking displaced by the construction. Mr. Balistrere mentioned a reciprocal arrangement with the Saints Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church at 1001 East Wyomissing Boulevard. Mr. Smith said construction will be focused on the summer months, to the extent possible.

Mr. Miller noted that the 'sketch' status of the plan didn't require any action. He appreciated the early look and the detail already available, adding that a zoning permit was issued earlier that day.

Nature Place at Angelica Creek Park – preliminary land development plan [0:10.16]

No one representing Berks Nature was observed to be in attendance, at about that time reserved for their presentation. Ms. Hoag said she'd heard they might not attend.

Other business:

§603.c.2 conditional use review-21 South 10th Street (conversion) [0:11.11]

Mr. Miller distributed the Zoning Office's comments and a revised parking plan from the applicant. Mr. Bealer complimented the detail, when considering the hand-drawn nature of the plans. Mr. Miller agreed and referred to the background on the property given in the zoning report, which goes on to recommend an approval. He noted that, whereas available parking is a frequent concern, it is in this case provided in sufficient quantity at 946 Cherry Street. He said its off-site location is still a concern insofar as any available spaces closer to the building would likely be used instead. Mr. Lauter questioned the reasoning behind the offer of additional parking seven blocks away. Mr. Miller wasn't sure, and didn't think it made any difference in the merit of the application. Mr. Lauter wondered about the means of reserving and securing the off-street parking. Mr. Bealer, recalling from a personal experience, said that, as long as the lot is posted 'private', trespassing vehicles can be ticketed by the police. Mr. Raffaelli noted that the application included a 'petition' supporting the project, but with several petitioners from other neighborhoods and, in some cases, other municipalities. Mr. Cinfici recognized duplicates, as well, but noted that many were from the more-immediate area. Mr. Miller didn't know what to make of the petition, adding that it isn't a required part of the application and wouldn't necessarily influence the decision one way or the other. Mr. Bealer suggested the floor plan might be lacking a required second means of egress from the second and third floors, while noting that the units exceeded the minimum required by the Zoning Ordinance. Mr. Raffaelli reminded that conversions violate the intent of the Comprehensive Plan's policies on residential density. Mr. Miller agreed, while alluding to conflicting language in the land-use ordinances that prevail legally. Mr. Bealer suggested that, owing to the total rehabilitation, the property would be modernized and safer when finished, satisfying a Comprehensive Plan objective in improving the 'housing stock'. Mr. Cinfici felt the need to weigh the benefit of an increasing assessed value, as opposed to a potential demolition, though he was personally against further divisions of existing residential properties. Mr. Miller agreed, falling back on the floor areas proposed and the off-street parking available. Mr. Cinfici cautioned against the possibility of the parking being rented separately. Mr. Miller assumed it had to be provided with the apartment leases, for compliance, but would seek confirmation.

Mr. Bealer moved to recommend City Council's approval of the second dwelling unit, with reservations posted in the parking area and consideration of a secondary egress from the upper floors. Mr. Lauter seconded, seeking clarification on the management and policies of the off-street parking at 946 Cherry Street. And the Commission voted unanimously to recommend that City Council approve the proposed conversion of 21 South 10th Street.

Resolution #6-2016

§513.a approval reaffirmation-Aramark Parking Lot [0:34.41]

Mr. Miller said that the improvements agreement issue was again the reason for the recording delay.

Mr. Lauter moved to reaffirm the July 2015 parking plan approval. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to reaffirm their July 28th approval, Resolution No. 33-2015, for the 'Aramark Parking Lot' plan.

Resolution #7-2016

§513.a approval reaffirmation-RDG Warren Street Cell Site [0:35.51]

Ms. Hoag recalled having recently received a revised plan.

Mr. Bealer moved to reaffirm the November 2015 land development plan approval. Mr. Lauter seconded.

And the Commission voted unanimously to reaffirm their November 24th approval, Resolution No. 56-2015, for the 'RDG Warren Street Cell Site' final plan.

Resolution #8-2016

review the draft 2015 Planning Commission Annual Report [0:37.52]

Mr. Miller explained some incomplete sections reserved in anticipation of some last-minute information. He said the finished report is due to City Council on the March 1st statutory deadline. Mr. Cinfici complimented the work, and suggested adding a reference to the Commission's approval of the 2016 meeting schedule. The Commission discussed the status of some projects under construction and some plans expected in the coming year. Mr. Miller asked that the members act to approve the 'general content' of the report.

Mr. Bealer moved to approve the draft 2015 Annual Report. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve their 2015 Annual Report

Resolution #9-2016

review the draft February 2, 2015 meeting minutes [0:48.29]

The members considered the minutes of the meeting postponed a week from January 26th.

Mr. Lauter moved to accept the February 2nd minutes, as presented. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the February 2nd meeting minutes.

Resolution #10-2016

Mr. Bealer mentioned the Blighted Property Review Committee's upcoming determination hearing, its first meeting in a while, scheduled for March 17th.

Mr. Miller shared a sketch of another proposed artificial-turf conversion, this time for Albright College's practice fields at North 12th and Exeter, not expecting it to be presented as a 'land development' plan. The members briefly discussed the improvements in the technology.

Mr. Lauter moved to adjourn the *regular* February meeting. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission adjourned the February 23rd meeting. – 8:50p